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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the findings of a one year national study. The research was directed at determining the status of culturally pluralistic programs in 29 urban school districts across the United States. Statistical and descriptive information was gathered from 130 urban school districts by means of questionnaires and observation teams. Among the factors which assisted in the implementation of culturally pluralistic programs are the following: (1) reliance on a combination of highly qualified staff and strong district commitment, (2) a large competent instructional staff performing well defined roles, (3) the promotion of parental, student and community involvement, and (4) staff training. There are six strategies which school districts will have to undertake in order to renew and reform urban instructional programs to provide adequate education to the ever increasing number of culturally pluralistic communities. They are as follows: (1) school district commitment, (2) the development of a new philosophy emphasizing enrichment activities, (3) comprehensive planning, (4) hiring for diversity, (5) differentiated staff development, and (6) formative evaluation. (Author/AM)

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STRATEGIES FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF CULTURAL PLURALISM

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STRATEGIES FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF CULTURAL PLURALISM

In the middle fifties (Brown, 1954), entire sixties (Escobedo, 1976), and early seventies (Rodrigues, 1971; Lau, 1974), urban school districts, such as Los Angeles, San Antonio, and San Francisco, were taken to court by students and parents for their neglective and oppressive treatment. Inner city parents and students charged urban school districts with "irreconcilable differences," that is, urban school districts persisted in having their relationship and treatment of their students, whose character had changed considerably,* guided by the outdated melting pot theory. The courts found that mistreatment by the urban school districts was detrimental to the well being of their spouses, but that divorce was not possible, and the differences were reconcilable. Therefore, inner city schools were ordered to change their treatment toward students and parents, and concomitantly a new philosophical concept was adopted. So it is under court urging, Office for Civil Rights supervision (1970 Memorandum)[1], and federal funding (ESEA) that some urban school districts are flirting with while others are courting seriously the concept of cultural pluralism. Recent observation of this courtship by one chaperon, Urban Education Studies headed by Francis Chase, is providing evidence that positive interaction, although sporadic, is taking place with promise of bearing intellectually talented and culturally healthy youngsters. While a happy marriage is still in the distance, there are definite signs that neglect and abuse are turning to respect and cooperation by urban school districts toward

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* Of a 1977 survey conducted by Urban Education Studies of 29 urban school districts, 15 had racial or ethnic majority student enrollment (12 black, 2 Latino, and 1 Hawaiian) and the remaining 14 districts were white majorities.

racial and ethnic minorities and language minority students and parents.

While cultural pluralistic programs were created to counter negative self-concepts and negative cultural images absorbed by racial and ethnic minorities, caused by inappropriate actions by school district personnel, conceptually, cultural pluralism extends beyond this narrow interpretation. Cultural pluralism dictates that school personnel design instructional programs, organize experiences, and create curricula so that all pupils will be assured to explore, learn, and respect their own cultural and historical heritages as well as those of others. Partially because a high degree of cultural programs are bicultural in nature rather than multicultural, student enrollment is generally limited to the minority group the program is particularly addressed to.[2] Thus bilingual programs and ethnic studies courses are composed mostly of non-whites, consequently program goals tend to be heavily targeted toward remediation. This restricted interpretation of cultural pluralism by school leaders is due mostly to educators excessively relating cultural pluralism with the equal opportunity movement.

Numerous conversations with many educators reveal they view cultural pluralistic programs as a strategy by ethnic groups to extend their sociopolitical interests. Hence these cultural oriented programs are considered to be political interventions rather than educationally valuable endeavors. It is ironic that these instructional programs are still for the most part remediation centered when the multicultural education phenomenon in the United States was principally motivated to reject and counter the cultural deficit explanation of minority students' failure in school. But, even if the major intent of the cultural pluralism movement was political and economic oriented (which advocates do not support), such interests in

education are legitimate and do not warrant the extreme unfavorable reaction demonstrated by school leaders. W. A. Goodenough advises educators to examine closely how schools manipulate access to micro-cultures since the distribution of power within any society is related to the distribution of cultural knowledge and skills, thus access to privilege.[3] Socialization of students by schools has been a pervasive function since the inception of formal instruction in America. Educators, then, should not be as repulsed by this dimension in cultural pluralism efforts as they have demonstrated. Instead, educational leaders must concern themselves with moving away from homogenous interpretation of culture and move toward emphasizing learning not only of inter-group culture but intra-group diversity as well, and such learning must be by all students and staff. Finally, to counter the deficit background concept, educators must embrace the anthropologist's perspective, that is, many children have a culturally different learning environment at home, consequently urban schools must change their curriculum and teaching methods to be consistent with their students' cultural backgrounds.[4]

Urban Education Studies (UES), funded by the Spencer Foundation in 1976 to discover promising developments, problem-solving strategies, and factors essential to successful program implementation in urban school districts, surveyed twenty-nine urban school districts and visited five* of these twenty-nine districts during 1977 to collect data on cultural pluralism so as to gain a fairly accurate picture of its extensiveness, variety of programs and quality of implementation. The statistical data and on-site team observations confirmed some well-known suspicions and supported findings of previous studies.[5] The surveyed school districts self-identified

*Atlanta, Dallas, Milwaukee, Oakland and Toledo were the five districts visited by UES observation teams.

130 programs as fitting the cultural pluralism category. Of this number, sixty-one were labeled as bilingual and thirty-seven projects were classified multicultural while the remaining thirty-two were efforts devoted to improve intercultural interaction or eliminate bias in curriculum and school procedures. Participation of ethnic groups in these one hundred and thirty programs revealed a distribution of 45.8% Latino, 29.3% white, 17.3% black and 7.6% other (mostly Native American and Hawaiian). Therefore, for every one hundred persons participating in a school sponsored cultural pluralism activity, 71 were minority and only 29 were white. The observation of the five districts visited by UES teams, usually composed of practitioners and university professors, revealed the minority individuals were uniformly of the same racial or ethnic background. Furthermore, the primary source of funding for cultural pluralistic efforts was the federal government; 72.3% of the funding was made available under ESEA and ESAA sources. It would seem that to date the character and scope of multicultural education are directly correlated to federal guidelines and congressional allocation.

While the cultural pluralistic undertakings were placed into three broad categories (bilingual, multicultural, and overcoming discrimination), descriptions of the 130 projects showed a wide variety. The range went from projects being marginal to programs clearly centered on the definition and purpose of cultural pluralism. Fortunately, there were more of the latter than the former. The cause for this wide continuum is probably best explained by the school district's familiarity with cultural pluralism. School districts whose administrators were knowledgeable of cultural pluralism had excellently designed programs (multiple purposes, comprehensive coverage, focused activities), whereas

school districts whose understanding of cultural pluralism was vague had projects that were deficient in many areas. The most progressive and successful efforts in cultural pluralism were found in two areas, bilingual education and curriculum development.

It is not surprising that either bilingual education or curriculum development should show the most advancement or be the most extensive in scope. The U.S. Supreme Court ruling on Lau (1974) requires a school district with non-English speaking students to provide language instruction in the child's native language. Language minority student enrollment has been increasing across the country especially in urban school districts and the upward trend is anticipated to continue. Taking one language group, for example, in 1966 Los Angeles Unified School District recorded 19% of its student population as Spanish surname while in 1977, Spanish surname enrollment rose to 34.9%.[6] Also Latinos are the fastest growing population because of a high birth rate and large immigration. Further, it is estimated that there are 11 million Latinos and 29 million other bilinguals in the United States.[7] Hence, just the magnitude of increasing numbers is forcing school districts to develop some type of bilingual program for this exploding student population. Consequently, Dallas, with experienced leadership at the executive level, is moving with a strong Spanish speaking bilingual program; Milwaukee is sponsoring a total immersion German bilingual program, and San Francisco is diligently coping with a multi-lingual program for Spanish, Korean, Vietnamese, and Chinese.

Similarly there should be no mystery as to the strong furtherance of curriculum reform in the cultural pluralism movement. Curriculum development has had a long history in American education and is considered the

heart of instruction. With the abundance of skilled staff in curriculum development, school districts have addressed themselves to eliminate prejudices and stereotypes of minorities in instructional material, to generate new culturally fair lessons and texts, and to insert new ethnic studies courses. UES observation teams found multi-cultural social studies units developed in Atlanta, Dallas, and Milwaukee. However, some drawbacks were found with each. In Dallas, an impressive array of multi-media materials for use in grades k-6 were not being used by many teachers and some appeared ignorant of their availability. In Atlanta, the program did not appear to be fully implemented, and in Milwaukee, the content regarding Native American and Hispanic cultures needed to be greatly expanded.

At the other end of the spectrum, a few school districts are stretching the limits of what constitutes a multi-cultural program. These suspect efforts are found mostly in the category of promoting intercultural interaction. For example, Oakland self-identified its adult day program as being multi-cultural, but after inspection it is probably better labeled a vocational program. Atlanta with its North Side School of Performing Arts is providing many blacks with abundant opportunities for participation in the arts. While both districts are doing a commendable job of providing necessary service to minority adults and youths, their efforts toward establishing strong bonds between different cultures are tangential, and the school districts should concentrate their expertise in promoting mainline multi-cultural experiences. Again, the wide diversification of cultural pluralistic programs is probably a result of varied levels of understanding by school administrators of multi-cultural and bilingual education and their legitimate differences of opinion regarding content, modes of instructional delivery and to a lesser extent objectives.

Even though a number of urban school districts have developed fundamentally sound programs to promote intercultural understanding, the progress of implementation is uneven. Evidence to justify this judgement was found at school districts visited. The series of on site visits by UES teams revealed an imbalance of progress in ethnic projects in such districts as Dallas, Milwaukee and San Francisco.* Observations uncovered that while all three school districts had a worthwhile Native American program, each project lagged far behind their bilingual and black studies counterparts. In addition, most districts are doing a commendable job of reducing discriminatory coverage of minorities in their instructional material but lesser action on district practice and policy is yielding minimal lowering of unfavorable treatement toward minorities.

Of greater importance to individuals trying to ascertain urban school districts' cultural pluralism attempts was the uncovering of reasons to explain the unevenness of progress and quality. Restated, what factors were observed that gave programs high ratings of successfulness or promise? First, a majority of the programs which were scored as effective seemed to rely heavily on a combination of highly qualified staff and strong district commitment. Fuller program implementation was occurring in districts where leadership was expert in content knowledge, had teaching experience, and substantial administrative skill with multi-cultural or bilingual education. Also it was characteristic of high rated programs to find project staff that were well versed in their responsibilities and had realistic views of what was accomplishable in regard to certain time frames. Directly related to staff was the aspect

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*San Francisco visited by author not by UES team.

of district commitment. Where knowledgeable personnel was found at the executive and mid-management level, explicit commitment was voiced and nurtured. Attempts at informing the total district staff and involving the effected community were an integral part of the operation. The most notable district exhibiting these two factors was Dallas.

Second, a crucial factor promoting success was having competent instructional staff in ample numbers performing well defined roles. Instructional staff that had pre-service training, previous experience with or in-service in program procedures and program curriculum appeared to be better organized, more motivated, and adept at carrying out their normal tasks and meeting unexpected or new situations. Also, having sufficient numbers of instructional staff allowed some districts to differentiate their staffing pattern forming necessary support teams and permitting delegation of responsibility to be evenly distributed. Milwaukee's South Division High School was favorably reviewed because of the quality staff factor. Conversely, the critical drawback of poorly implemented programmatic efforts was ascribed to lack of adequate staff both in quantity and competency. Unfortunately, the axiom of having a small core of able staff members strategically positioned working for change does not apply in this situation as it does elsewhere. Cultural pluralism is too massive a mission for a limited number of staff members in large urban districts to accomplish. There are too many components to change or install so that a core staff can not manage all that is necessary without becoming overworked and disheartened.

Thirdly, programs designated as having great promise by UES observation teams promoted parental, student and community involvement. It was noted that encouragement of citizen participation brought both practical

and psychological benefits to the school district and school community. For the spiritually and financially troubled urban school district, community involvement brought much needed cooperation and support in the form of untapped human resources and city facilities. On the other hand, parents no longer felt alienated, students had some influence over their education and both received greater satisfaction from their inclusion. By both school and community joining hands, a true partnership is formed and sincere sense of a school community relation is established. A vivid illustration of community participation as a power to upgrade urban education was recorded in Toledo. Nathan Hale Community School was founded, designed and built by neighborhood people who knew what they wanted and worked with city and school officials to get it. Atlanta's Northside Parents for Public Schools, organized to stem white flight, was another outstanding example of what can be accomplished by dedicated volunteer parents.

Lastly, staff training was found to be a vital contributor to enhancing program implementation. Since the practice of bilingual and multicultural instruction in the classroom is relatively new, most instructional staff members were and are constantly learning on the job. District programs which included staff in-service sessions on a regular basis benefited in a number of ways. For example, coordination among teachers was coherent, teacher made materials adopted to suit students in the program were available due to in-service time, program goals and objectives were internationalized more, procedures and reports were followed and made better, and communication was extensive and intensive.

If the status of cultural pluralism efforts in urban school districts across the country ranges from poor to outstanding and most societal factors

give indication that multicultural programs will be increasing, what strategies will need to be undertaken to improve present and future programs? From the start it must be clear that the general response to this question is not new nor should it come as a surprise. Strategies to bring quality to multi-cultural programs are no different than those understood necessary for other emergent programs.

Strategy one: School District Commitment

The district leadership must recognize and accept the genuine need for multi-cultural education. Cultural pluralistic programs must be considered valid instructional endeavors to provide learning experiences suitable for culturally different students. The leadership must come to accept some facts as lasting realities. (1) The world is becoming increasingly non-white. It is estimated that of the six billion people inhabiting the world by the year 2000, five billion will be non-white.[8] (2) Urban life is more popular than rural. By 2000 A.D. 90% of the United States population will be living in urban settings.[9] (3) Multicultural societies develop in the wake of urbanism. Therefore, urban school districts must make a sincere, internal commitment to cultural pluralism and that vow must be based on providing service compatible with its community. This commitment must be accompanied with the school trustees increasing the funds for such programs and these funds must come from the local district budget.

Strategy two: New Philosophy: Enrichment and Mainstream

After a total commitment is made, the school board and the administrative cabinet of the district must adopt a new philosophy anchored to

two perspectives. One, cultural pluralistic programs must be constructed to dispense enrichment learning activities rather than remedial type learning experiences. Cultural pluralism must no longer be considered a compensatory type program. Elimination of the deficiency viewpoint from cultural pluralism is probably the most important step necessary to upgrade the education of urban school districts. This one small but significant move opens the door to greater benefits for many more individuals. In essence, perspective one leads to perspective two. School decision makers must learn from past movements, in particular from the desegregation and special education movement. We, in education, must come to realize that separation of any group from the "regular education program" cannot last. Just as racial and ethnic minorities and handicapped children are being brought into the mainstream, so cultural pluralistic programs must be incorporated into the main current. Further, just as compensatory education programs, begun as adjunct operations, have come to dominate and transform the regular curricula, so cultural pluralism will have to become the comprehensive philosophy and curricula of urban school districts.

Strategy three: Comprehensive Planning

Whether cultural pluralism is to be implemented on a limited or district wide basis, comprehensive planning is mandatory. Few, if any, districts have organized their thoughts about how to effectively implement cultural pluralism for the next five to ten years. Because most districts view cultural pluralism programs as limited in scope, temporal in nature and expendable when the federal funds diminish, no concrete planning or thorough thinking has materialized about what actions

will be necessary to accommodate the inevitable expansion and how cultural pluralism can be best integrated. At a time when urban school districts are undergoing reassessment of their long range goals and priorities, it seems a most opportune time to include comprehensive planning for cultural pluralism. In conjunction with planning, the district should invite community representatives to participate. Nowhere is it more appropriate or more important to include parents, students and interested community persons than in the planning stage.

Strategy four: Hiring for Diversity

Since the quality of present multi-cultural education is determined by the nature of district staff available, it is imperative that the district does all it can to employ staff who have knowledge and skills necessary to carry out a multi-cultural program. Hiring for diversity must be both a short and long range priority. Since there are very few universities and colleges that have teacher training programs directed at multi-cultural education, for the next five years at least, districts will have to depend upon hiring individuals whose cultures are similar to their students'. As pre-service and in-service programs become more multi-culturally focused, then districts will be able to expand their programmatic goals and objectives.

Strategy five: Differentiated Staff Development

Concurrent with intensified efforts to hire more diversity, urban school districts will have to launch differentiated in-service programs to upgrade all district personnel about cultural pluralism. Differentiated in-service means varying the content, in-service approach, time, time interval, and intensity to accomplish the objectives for various groups.

That is, teachers will need intensive and continuous involvement with curriculum and classroom management while principals will require infrequent but sequential attendance at in-service sessions addressed at developing classroom observation and feedback skills. Meanwhile, central office personnel will be required to take in-service on how to evaluate cultural pluralistic objectives and products. Therefore, not only will the content of the in-service vary according to the staff members relationship to the program but the in-service approach will vary according to the in-service objectives. A formula to follow in planning in-service is: the closer the involvement by the staff member to the program, the more intensive, continuous, and varied the sessions should be. But again, in-service should go beyond touching just program staff, it needs to make firm contact with all district staff from board of trustees to school clerical personnel.

Strategy six: Formative Evaluation

Improvement can begin only after useful assessment occurs. To date cultural pluralistic programs have been plagued by evaluation rather than assisted. At this time, evaluation of cultural pluralistic programs is afflicted with (1) lack of objective instruments to measure student achievement; (2) premature summative evaluation; (3) non-utilization of findings by school districts and (4) insufficient numbers of district evaluators knowledgeable about cultural pluralism. Urban school districts must quickly move to accomplish the following. (a) Adopt a formative evaluation scheme where continuous data are collected on programmatic objectives. Thus process is being examined not student outcomes. (b) On-going analysis of collected data is necessary in order to alter faulty program practice. (c) Employ knowledgeable or trained

evaluators to be informed about cultural pluralism. These evaluators must be informed about cultural pluralism. The evaluators should then work closely with program administrators and teachers to identify discrepancies and plan corrections. (d) Efforts should be made to either purchase or develop instruments which evaluate objectively the academic performance of pupils in multi-cultural programs. (3) The practice of using summative evaluation on a three or four year program to determine if it should be continued should be avoided!

In closing, it is apparent that urban school districts have moved forward to provide worthwhile education for its culturally diverse student communities. But if the courtship of cultural pluralism is to progress into a meaningful partnership, then urban school districts will have to accelerate their efforts toward renewal and reform through the actualization of the above six strategies. If this recent courtship of cultural pluralism by urban school districts were to result in a permanent relationship, it could revitalize the social, economic, and cultural fabric of America just as the match making of industrial technology and urban cities led the United States to be a world power.

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